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meera nanda

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A Note to the ReAdeRs

All quotations and facts and figures cited in the book are backed by complete references provided in the Notes at the end of the book. Readers are invited to follow along by matching the first few words of a sentence with the correct page number listed in the notes. those interested in further

reading will find the Bibliographic essay useful.

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Introduction

God and Globalization in India

India had its own 'why do they hate us?' moment after the city of Mumbai came under attack in November 2008 by a bunch of gunmen with links to terrorist outfits in

Pakistan. Many in India answered the question much the same way George Bush famously explained the 9/11 attacks on the United states: Islamic terrorists hate us because we are good and they are evil; we are free and democratic and they hate freedom and democracy.

this 'us–them' divide was further linked to globalization, a word that got bandied about a great deal in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. Pakistanis hate us, many argued in India, because we are winning in the global economy race, while they are a bunch of sore losers bent upon dimming the bright glow of our economic miracle. the terror attacks were seen as a conspiracy meant to destroy the confidence of global investors, slow down the outsourcing of It and other jobs to India, and stop foreign tourists from coming.

India is seen as winning the globalization race not only on the economic front, but on the civilizational front as well. As Robert Kaplan, a well-known foreign policy expert, wrote in *The New York Times* shortly after the Mumbai attacks, globalization has led Indians to look for roots of their 'vibrantly free' democracy in hinduism, while Muslims of India and Pakistan are looking for roots in the 'Islamic world community… and withdrawing into beards, skull-caps and burqas in some cases; and self-segregating into ghettos in other cases'. A similar sentiment was echoed in India as well. M.V. Kamath, a commentator well known for his strong hindutva views, wrote in *The Organiser* that while 'indestructible India, wearing a cheerful smile and forgiving countenance is

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busy sending rockets to the moon', its 'sick' Muslim neighbour and many Indian Muslims are bent upon isolating themselves by 'wearing skull-caps, forcing women to wear burqas, and otherwise refusing to join the mainstream'.

something rather strange is going on here. the extreme conservatism of some Muslims, who are indeed withdrawing into traditional attire and symbols of their faith, is made to stand for the entire 'Islamic world community'. But on the other hand, the accomplishments of India —of *all* Indians, belonging to *all* of India's many faiths and creeds—are happily claimed for the glory of hinduism. India, with its hindu civilization, is presented as the bright, forward-facing side of globalization, while Pakistan—and indeed, Islam itself — becomes its dark, demonic, and backward-facing underside. the world gets divided into two: the winners who have the right kind of civilizational resources to play and win in the global economy, and the rest who are deemed to be laggards, if not total losers.

What this Book is about

this book challenges this 'us' and 'them' narrative. It sets out to show that India is not free from the forces of politicized religiosity which expresses itself in a growing sense of hindu majoritarianism.

Indeed, politicized religiosity seems to be the order of the day everywhere. Globalization is making the whole world more religious—and all religions more political. even as they are drawing closer economically, people all over the world are becoming more self-conscious of their religious and civilizational heritage. one can say that globalization has been good for the gods—and often, sadly, for gods' warriors as well who incite conflict and

violence in the name of their faith.

India is no exception to this global trend.

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this book aims to explore the changing religious landscape of India as it globalizes. It not only describes the changing trends and texture of everyday expressions of hinduism, it connects these trends to the larger political, economic, and institutional shifts that the country is experiencing as it emerges as a major player in the global economy and world affairs. the overall aim of this book is to describe how modern hindus are taking their gods with them into the brave new world and how hindu institutions are making use of the new opportunities opened up by neo-liberalism and globalization.

the following, in broad brushstrokes, is the picture this book presents:

- As India is liberalizing and globalizing its economy, the country is experiencing a rising tide of popular hinduism which is leaving no social segment and no public institution untouched. there is a surge in popular religiosity among the burgeoning and largely hindu middle classes, as is evident from a boom in pilgrimage and invention of new and more ostentatious rituals.
- this religiosity is being cultivated by the emerging state temple–corporate complex that is replacing the more secular public institutions of the Nehruvian era.

In other words, the deregulatory regime put in place to encourage a neo-liberal market economy is also boosting the demand and the supply for religious services in India's God market.

- Aided by the new political economy, a new hindu religiosity is getting ever more deeply embedded in the everyday life, both in the public and the private spheres. Use of explicitly hindu rituals and symbols in the routine affairs of the state and electoral politics has become so commonplace that hinduism has become the *de facto* religion of the 'secular' Indian state which is constitutionally bound to have no official religion.

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- Given India's growing visibility in the global economy, hindu religiosity is getting fused with feelings of national pride and dreams of becoming a superpower. the country's economic success is being attributed to the superiority of hindu values, and India is seen as entitled to the Great Power status because of its ancient hindu civilization. thus the hard-won achievements of all of India's many diverse religious traditions and cultures are being

absorbed into the religion of the majority community.

- this new culture of political hinduism is both triumphalist and intolerant in equal measures: while it wants the entire world to admire the superior tolerance and non-violence of the hindu civilization, it tolerates intolerance and even violence against religious minorities at home.

this, in short, is the case this book will make.

two caveats need to be added right away so that the readers don't have unrealistic expectations. this book will focus exclusively on the changing trends in popular hinduism, the majority religion of the country. Changes in India's minority religions will be acknowledged where and when needed, but not investigated in any detail.

the other point to keep in mind is that this book is about hinduism and not about organized movements for hindutva, or hindu nationalism. the trends in popular and public religiosity it describes cut across the secular–communal and left–right divides in the political domain. the cultural habit of imaging India in explicitly religious symbols of the majority community is not the exclusive preserve of the sangh Parivar, even though the latter uses it more explicitly and more often for communal and electoral purposes.

At the end of it all this book poses this question: What room does this India that dreams saffron-tinged superpower dreams have for non-hindu minorities? What happens to

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the India that Muslims, Christians, non-believers, and other non-hindus *also* call home as the country begins to see itself as India@superpower.oM? Can the country deliver on the promise of secularism without cultivating a secular culture and a secular polity?

Method of Enquiry: Sources of Data and Modes of Explanation

this book is not an academic report on a specific research project. But neither is it a book of polemics or ideological argumentation. Rather, this book combines political analysis and philosophical reflection with hard data, painstakingly collected from a vast variety of sources available in the public domain. the idea is to present the reader with the most cutting-edge social theories about globalization and resurgence of religion, backed with the best available facts and figures about everyday hindu religiosity from the ground up. It is an attempt to breach the walls between the Ivory tower of academic social sciences and the home, the street, the café, and wherever else non-academic intelligent readers live, work, and read. In short, this is a work of honest and rigorous scholarship meant to enlighten the reader and to make her think.

Like any work of contemporary social history, this book tries to connect the dots between many diverse sources of information. It uses material obtained from the mass media, opinion polls, scholarly studies, government reports, research reports of think tanks, and websites of temples/ashrams. this data will show that:

- the newly prosperous middle classes are turning away from the more philosophical, neo-Vedantic form of religiosity and embracing a more ritualistic and superstitious

form
of popular hinduism centred on temples, pilgrimages,

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and popular saints or god-men/women. the signs of the rising religiosity are all around us: there is a boom in construction of temples and mega temples, some of which house gentrified gods and goddesses, while others offer newly invented 'ancient' rituals. the number of people undertaking pilgrimages is rising, as is the fellowship of gurus and god-men.

• this religiosity is becoming more and more public and political. Religious observances like homas (or yagnas), jagrans, and kathas that used to be relatively simple domestic affairs are becoming more and more ostentatious, expensive, and public. In addition, religious rituals like yagnas and yatras (pilgrimages) are becoming mobilizing tools for political causes of all sorts, from benign ones like protecting the environment and preventing AIds to the more sinister shobha yatras and samaj mahotsavas (social festivals) which are meant to consolidate a majority hindu consciousness.

• the rise in religiosity has the support of the leading institutions of the state, the temples, and the business sector, often working in a three-sided partnership.

the last issue brings us to the task of explaining the rising hindu religiosity. there are some who say that Indians are innately more other-worldly and that hinduism is a 'total way of life' in which the spiritual motive cannot be separated from other spheres of life. While the rest of the world might be expected to become less religious with modernity, India will always be religious.

this book will steer clear of these we-are-like-that-only kinds of theories. Instead, it will treat religiosity as any other cultural phenomenon which ebbs and flows, and changes with changing time. this book argues that the rise in hindu religiosity can be explained by the emergence of the 'state–temple–corporate

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complex' that is filling the space that the 'socialist' state of the Nehruvian era has ceded to the private sector.

In one sense, the existence of the nexus between the state, temples, and the private sector is nothing new. the supposedly secular state of India has never shied away from celebrating hindu religious symbols in the public sphere—all in the name of propagating Indian culture. Merchants and business houses, too, have a long history, going back many centuries, of sponsoring temples and monasteries devoted to their own chosen god or gurus.

But the current neo-liberal economic regime, this book will argue, is bringing the state, the religious establishment, and the business/corporate elite in a much closer relationship than ever

before. As the Indian state is withdrawing from its public sector obligations, it is actively seeking partnership with the private sector and the hindu establishment to run schools, universities, tourist facilities, and other social services. As a result, public funds earmarked for creating public goods are increasingly being diverted into facilitating the work of these private charitable institutions which bear a distinctly hindu traditionalist bias. this, in turn, is helping to 'modernize' hinduism: many of the newly minted, english-speaking, and computer-savvy priests, astrologers, vastu shastris, and yoga teachers who service the middle classes' insatiable appetite for religious ritual, are products of this nexus between the state, the corporate sector, and the temples.

Structure of the Book

the book opens and closes with two big ideas, namely, globalization and secularism. sandwiched between these bookends are three chapters the contents of which are described below:

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the opening chapter is titled ' *India and the Global Economy: A Very Brief Introduction* '. this chapter provides an extended introduction to the phenomenon of globalization as it pertains to India. It provides a brief economic history of post-Independence India and charts its path to market reforms and integration into global markets. It pays special attention to the stark socio-economic inequalities which are worsening under the new economy. It

also provides fair amount of detail regarding the privatization of higher education which has opened up fresh opportunities for religious institutions to enter the education market. this chapter is meant to set the stage for the rest of the book.

Chapter 2 is titled ' *The Rush Hour of the Gods: Globalization and Middle-Class Religiosity* '. this chapter examines the 'rush hour of the gods' in contemporary India. Piecing together media reports, opinion polls, and academic studies, this chapter describes the many ways in which the new hindu middle classes are becoming more religious and how the texture of the public sphere is becoming more distinctively hindu than ever before.

Chapter 3 is titled ' *The State–Temple–Corporate Complex and the Banality of Hindu Nationalism* '. this chapter looks at the institutional underpinnings of the rising hindu religiosity and hindu nationalism. It describes the nexus between the state, the temples, and the private sector in three broad areas: training of hindu priests, creation of 'deemed universities' by religious endowments, and religious tourism. this chapter also looks at the phenomenon of banal or ordinary, everyday hindu nationalism. It describes how the worship of the nation is becoming indistinct from the worship of hindu gods and goddesses.

Chapter 4 is titled 'India@superpower.com: *How We See Ourselves* . It describes how India's success in the global economy is being ascribed to the Great hindu Mind. It

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examines the dark side of this triumphalism which shows up as prejudice against non-hindu minorities, especially Muslims, and, to a lesser extent, Christians. this chapter also examines the role of Voice of India, a New delhi
based publishing house that specializes in producing hindu triumphalist literature that openly derides the god of monotheistic religions.

Chapter 5 is titled *Rethinking Secularization (with India in mind)* . It looks at India's experience of secularism through the prism of social theories of secularization and de secularization. It tries to understand why the god market has continued to boom under the peculiarly Indian brand of secularism and why it is flourishing under neo-liberal economic reforms.

A personal note

this book is an unplanned by-product of a much bigger enterprise that I have been engaged with for the last few years. But precisely because it emerged so unexpectedly, and yet made a lot of sense when it did come together, this book is all the more dear to me.

In 2005, I was awarded a fellowship by the John templeton
Foundation to work on a book-length study of the relationship between modern science and hinduism in contemporary India. I was especially keen to explore the career of 'scientific temper'—an idea which was dear to Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhim Rao Ambedkar, and other secular humanists among the founding fathers of independent India. Indeed, to cultivate the temper of science is one of the fundamental duties of citizens laid out in the Constitution of India.

Like anyone trying to understand the cultural impact

of
modern science in India, I was immediately confronted with a paradox: there is 'science' everywhere, but hardly any sign

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of the critical spirit of science. India is practically drowning in 'science': gurus in their ashrams and on tV, and even professors in government-aided colleges and universities, have honed the art of casting every conceivable superstition, from astrology to vastu, as 'science'.

since it is the educated, english-speaking, urban moneyed classes who are the biggest consumers of hindu pseudo science, I naturally wanted to understand the cultural and religious world-view of this growing section of the Indian population. My attempt to understand the religious beliefs and practices of middle-class Indians resulted in a long essay I called 'the Rush hour of the Gods'. this essay became the nucleus for the present book.

once I started focusing on middle-class religiosity, I had no choice but to look at the growing globalization of the Indian economy. It is impossible to understand the mindset of Indian middle classes today without first understanding the quantum leap in their aspirations and dreams brought about by market reforms and trade liberalization that India embraced in the early 1990s.

Well, once I began to place religiosity in the changing political economic context, one bit of evidence led to another discovery and soon a picture began to emerge. I began to understand

better how liberalization had increased both the demand and the supply of religious services in the private and the public sphere. Before I knew it, I had developed a thesis that could stand on its own.

I took leave of absence from my original research project.

the research and writing of this book was done entirely on my own time and without any financial support from the templeton Foundation. the templeton Foundation bears no responsibility either for the existence of this book or for the ideas it expresses.

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With this book in print, I look forward to returning to where I started from. My original project is nearing completion and will soon appear in print under the title *Tryst with Destiny: Scientific Temper and Secularization in India.*

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1

India and the Global Economy: A Very Brief Introduction

India everywhere
India's promotional slogan, davos, 2006 davos, 2006

When you talk of 9.2 per cent growth rate, it becomes a statistical abstraction: 0.2 per cent of our people are growing at 9.2 per cent per annum. But there is a very large number whose growth rate is down to 0.2 per cent.
Mani shankar Aiyar

the ideology of hindutva and the economics of liberalization are not only reconcilable but complementary.
Aijaz Ahmad

India is becoming increasingly hindu as it globalizes. But what do we mean by globalization? Why is it that whenever any country opens up to global trade these days, it invariably ends up adopting a package of neo-liberal economic policies? What is 'neo-liberalism' anyway?

this chapter will first explain, in layperson's terms, what buzzwords like 'globalization' and 'neoliberalism' mean. It will then tell the story of how India came to embrace the gospel of free markets and global trade and how it is setting the stage for the growth of hinduism.

one note of caution is in order: the economic story told in this chapter is only meant to orient the reader to the rest of the book, which is less about Indian economics and more about

politicization of hinduism, and hinduization of politics. those looking for a more fine-grained analysis of economic

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facts and figures may want to consult the many excellent texts on these matters written by professional economists mentioned in the bibliographic essay that appears at the end of this book.

What is Globalization?

We live in a globalized world—who amongst us has not heard this statement repeatedly, endlessly, and mindlessly? But for all the monotonous repetitiveness, this statement is not a mere mantra. on the contrary, the technological infrastructure and the economic logic of globalization are beginning to touch the lives of a growing number of ordinary people in very real ways. the following two examples—the first recently reported by *The New York Times* and the second narrated by Gurcharan das, India's leading cheerleader for liberalization —are quite revealing.

G.P. sawant is an elderly man, a professional letter-writer who is losing his livelihood to cellphones. All his life, he earned a living sitting outside Mumbai's main post office, writing letters for his illiterate clients for a fee. But with easy access to cellphones, his services are no longer in much demand. And yet, the technological revolution that has made him jobless has also propelled his family into the ranks of the middle class: three of his four children are working in India's booming

information technology sector. When *The New York Times* talked to him in december 2007, one of his daughters was on assignment in New Jersey for Infosys, India's leading software company. When the *Times* journalist graciously offered to carry a letter from the father in Mumbai to his daughter in New Jersey, Mr sawant, the professional letter-writer, was puzzled: 'Why would I send her a letter? I'll just call her on the phone,' he said.

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Raju, a teenager in Pondicherry, works in a restaurant in his summer break to save money to go to 'computer classes'. he tells Gurcharan das, the author of *India Unbound* , that he has seen on tV 'this man, Bilgay [sic] who runs a software company and he is the richest man in the world'. Raju wants to be Bill Gates.

It is true that for each one of these upbeat stories, one can find many more stories of terrible deprivation and wasted lives. the much celebrated It sector is tiny compared to the size of the workforce, elite led and not open to the vast majority who can't speak American-accented english. one cannot therefore get carried away, as some market enthusiasts tend to.

And yet, one cannot deny that something new is afoot.

New possibilities are beginning to take hold of people's imagination: the mental horizons of ordinary working people in India now include 'Bilgay', 'New Jersey', and other distant people and lands. What is more, for the first time in human history, it has become technologically feasible for ordinary people,

using everyday, household gadgets, to communicate across oceans almost as easily as it is to talk to their neighbour neighbour across the street. even those who lack the resources and the opportunities are becoming aware of the possibilities.

so how do we define globalization that is sensitive to both its possibilities and the pitfalls? Anthony Giddens, the guru of Giddens, the guru of , the guru of the New Labour in the UK, described it best in his acclaimed Labour in the UK, described it best in his acclaimed in the UK, described it best in his acclaimed book, *The Consequences of Modernity:*

> Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

the same idea is also expressed eloquently by Ulrich Beck, one of globalization's staunchest critics:

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> Globality means that from now on, nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event; all inventions, victories, and catastrophes affect the whole world, and we must reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations, and institutions along a local–global axis.

Critics and advocates can—and do—disagree over how best

to regulate this intensification of local–global connections. But no one denies that the condition of globality, as Giddens and Beck call it, is real. Local events—the ups and downs of stock markets, changes in climate, the spread of Avian flu, for example—are becoming ever more intertwined with what happens many miles away in distant lands. the world is indeed getting smaller. But this is not all: more and more people are realizing that the world is getting smaller—and organizing their lives in light of this realization. As the awareness of globality begins to influence the decisions people make about their careers and businesses, it begins to act as a material force in society.

this small-ing of the world has been described as space–time compression by david harvey (1990) in his well-known work *The Condition of Postmodernity* . harvey and other scholars believe that this compression of space and time is what lies behind the change from the old-fashioned, assembly-line industrial production to flexible production in which the different stages of production—research and development, manufacture, financing, marketing, customer services, and the final consumption—are spread all over the world in search of higher profits or less regulation. the production process is broken apart into pieces, scattered to practically any corner of the globe, and coordinated through the new technologies of communication and transportation.

Globalization can be understood as the sum total of processes that have brought about this space—time compression to the point when, at least in

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principle, anyone, from any place on earth, can instantaneously communicate with anyone, anywhere on this planet. Globalization is not new: it began the day our human ancestors left Africa and spread to all the continents some 120,000 years ago. But the creation of trans-planetary communication networks in the last thirty years or so is something radically new. Never before in human history have people been able to engage with each other, in real time, wherever on the habitable parts of planet earth they may be. For the first time in human history, another dimension of space —'super-territorial space', or space that is not linked to any specific physical territory on the map—has become widely available for carrying out all kind of activities, from buying and selling of goods to exchanging cultural and political ideas. Because the super-territorial space exists only in the communication networks, territorial boundaries provide no particular impediment to commerce carried out in this dimension.

the Internet is obviously the best example of this new dimension of globalization. But the Internet was made possible by quantum leaps in other technologies in the later half of the 20th century, including telecommunication satellites, fibre optics and telephony. We are only now beginning to get used to some of the social-cultural manifestations of these new technologies: the global media, electronic banking, and global commerce are only some of the examples.

What is Neo-liberalism?

one can rhapsodize all one wants about the fantastic possibilities of this interconnected world. But the condition of globality is a product—and a faithful servant— of a particularly ruthless, dog-eat-dog variety of global capitalism.

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At one level, the space–time compression is an unadulterated public good: news and views cross national boundaries at the speed of light and enrich public debate everywhere. But it is the owners and the managers of global capital who are benefiting the most out of globalization. It is the giant transnational corporations that are using the new technologies to scrounge the globe for cheap labour, tax breaks, and lax environmental laws. New technologies have given big businesses the physical ability to break down the production process into smaller and smaller units and move them to any corner of the world that can offer them a better deal. the threat of offshoring jobs to cheaper and more docile workers serves as a threat to discipline workers, especially in relatively high-wage countries.

Globalization, in other words, is helping capitalism to become hyper-capitalism—that is, more global, more entrenched, more exploitative, and more unjust than ever before. According to Jan Aart scholte, from whom the concept of hyper-capitalism is taken, globalization has not only increased the profitability of older, well-established industries (such as textiles, garments, consumer electronics), but has brought new spheres of social life (care capital through maid trade, medical tourism, surrogate motherhood), new natural resources (genetic information, biotechnology), and new services (information, communication) under the sway of the capitalist logic of profit and loss. Aided by globalization, then, more and more aspects of how we live have acquired a capitalist logic.

In what can only be called a great ideological sleight of hand, the phenomena of globalization and hyper-capitalism are treated as if they are some fundamental laws of nature which must be obeyed, at whatever cost to the social fabric. everywhere, one hears the assertion that it is 'globalization' that is forcing the public sector to sell off taxpayer-funded

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assets to private businesses, and that it is 'globalization' that is forcing factories to be shut down at one place only to reopen at a location where wages are low and working conditions poor. everyone, from democratically elected representatives of nation-states to powerful business interests, claims that they have no choice because there is simply no alternative to globalization.

this worship at the altar of globalization hides the reality of neo-liberal ideology. the fact is that contemporary global hyper capitalism has been made possible by a drastic restructuring of nation-states from their role as promoters of social welfare to enablers of markets. this transformation did not happen as the natural result of space–time compression made possible by new communication technologies. Rather, it is a thoroughly political project involving powerful transnational institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World trade organization, multinational corporations, and the national elites of different countries. What unites them is their shared faith in neo-liberal economics.

What is neo-liberalism and what does it have to do with globalization? the two are quite often merged, but they are conceptually distinct and can exist without each other. (that is to say that another kind of globalization that is not based upon neo-liberal economics is possible.)

the word neo-liberal is an abbreviation of 'neoclassical liberalism', a tradition which draws on several centuries of modern economic thought dating back to the writings of John Locke (1632–1704), Adam smith (1723–90), and david Ricardo (1772–1823). Neo-liberalism builds upon the *laissez-faire* (French for 'let people do as they choose') tenets of classical liberalism which promises that unconstrained market forces will 'naturally' bring prosperity and peace to society. Part of the classical liberal vision of unconstrained markets included lifting the national barriers to trade, which they believed

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interfered with efficient allocation of resources. Neo-liberals apply this eighteenth century thinking, which made sense when relatively small owner-managed enterprises, workers, and consumers were located in the same communities, to the vastly different twenty-first century hyper-capitalism when all local links between ownership, production, and consumption have been broken and reconstituted at a super-territorial level all across the globe.

economic liberalism went into eclipse for a brief period of about forty years, from the 1930s to the

1970s. this was the period when Western economies, battered by the Great depression, were open to trying out the ideas of John Maynard Keyenes (1883–1946) who recommended that governments 'prime the economic pump' by spending on public goods and giving direct support to the unemployed. In the Us, the New deal policies of Franklin d. Roosevelt were directly influenced by Keynes. outside the Communist Bloc, Keyensian economics was the major inspiration for the welfarist economic policies in Britain, sweden, Canada, and Australia.

By the 1970s, however, the state welfarist policies got bogged down with bureaucratic excesses and were exhausted of creative ideas. that is when economic liberalism came roaring back. Ideas of a new generation of free market economists, exemplified by Friedrich von hayek (1899–1992) and Milton Friedman (1912–2006), came to dominate the economic mindset of politicians and policymakers. these revived free market doctrines were embraced by Margaret thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan, followed by all other presidents, Republican and democrats alike, in the Us. Neo-liberalism soon became the dominant ideology (often referred to as the 'Washington Consensus') of global economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank which have shown a missionary zeal in

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spreading the gospel of markets to developing countries. All four of the fast

growing economies of the so-called BRIC quartet—Brazil, Russia, India, and China—have embraced neo-liberal economic policies prescribed by global financial institutions.

What are these policy prescriptions? the core of neo liberalism, like that of classical liberalism, is the belief that unconstrained market forces ('the invisible hand') will bring prosperity, democracy, and peace to all people, in all societies. the underlying principle is that the markets should lead, and societies should follow, without governments, labour unions, business cartels, or any other interest group trying to tinker with the imperative of making money. the rather devious genius of neo-liberalism is to wed this economic logic to core democratic ideals which people everywhere aspire for —the ideals of freedom from unchecked state power and individual freedoms of thought and speech. this market view of freedom ignores other equally valid aspirations for equal opportunity, justice, and fraternity which are often thwarted by the logic of profit making. It simultaneously celebrates individual freedom, and trivializes it by treating individual persons merely as economic agents who are only motivated by the pursuit of material gain.

What are the practical consequences of neo-liberalism, especially regarding globalization? Neo-liberalism argues for a borderless economy. It argues that the territorial borders of nation-states should not act as barriers against the free flow of goods, services, and capital investments. even though import of cheaper goods and services could wipe out the local producers (as in the case of cheap corn imports from the Us into Mexico, or cheaper It and BPo services from India to the Us), national economies are advised to allow these imports without any protective taxes because in the long run, so the thinking

goes, free trade will ‘weed out’

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inefficiencies and make the overall world economy more efficient. While businesses rake in the profits that come with such trade liberalization, the social costs of this ‘weeding out’ are passed on to workers and communities. In this scenario, democratically elected governments become the handmaidens of global capital: it becomes a part of their job description to work hard to remove tax barriers to imports and to facilitate exports so that hyper-capitalism can thrive.

this prescription for deregulation and tax cuts applyies not only to foreign trade but domestic as well. Because markets are seen as the natural guarantors of prosperity and freedom, governments—even those that are democratically elected—are seen as a necessary nuisance at best. By this logic, good governments are those that shrink themselves by contracting out taxpayers’ supported public institutions to private businesses and other non-governmental organizations, including the so-called faith-based organizations.

While privatization, disinvestment, and deregulation are the pillars of neo-liberalism, the state is not made entirely irrelevant. Radical conservatives like Grover Norquist may dream of cutting the government ‘to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub’, but neo-liberalism is not against government per se. After all, ardent neo-conservatives in the Us have no problems with the massive subsidies defence

and agricultural sectors get, nor have they been particularly exercised about the many wars their government continues to wage which take an enormous bite out of public finances. What the neo

liberals want, to use Aijaz Ahmad's pithy phrase, is 'a state that is weak in relation to labour but strong on behalf of capital'. the state's topmost priority, under the regime of neo

liberal globalization, is to facilitate the smooth running of the markets. In order for governments to become enablers of markets, they come to embrace the interests of the markets as the interests of the citizens and the nation itself. In the neo

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liberal vision, national economy should be run as a business and the focus should be on improving the bottom line. this managerial model of democracy has found many admirers in India. Chandrababu Naidu, the Andhra Pradesh chief minister who wanted to turn hyderabad into Cyberabad, and Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat accused of engineering the massacres of 2002 , both like to call themselves Ceos of their states. the actual record of these 'Ceos' has not been good for the poor. Chandrababu Naidu's regime aided by the World Bank, for example, slashed as 'wasteful' public investment in agriculture from 8.5 per cent in 1980s to 1.4 per cent in 2001 and agricultural output fell by nearly 17 per cent. the falling public investment, growing commercialization of agriculture, and indebtedness resulted in 16,770 farmers committing suicide in 1997–2005, the time

period when neo liberalism was the reigning ideology of the state government. the state also led the country in distress sale of kidneys, mostly by indebted farmers .

What is more, neo-liberalism changes the texture of democracy. If the government is to become more like a for profit corporation, citizens become more like consumers. their relationship with the representatives of the state changes from that of citizens to that of clients or consumers of government services. As consumers, they can demand better and more efficient delivery of services, but they cannot have much of a say in what services should take priority. the new buzzwords of neo-liberal governance are 'empowerment' through 'public–private partnership' to 'solve problems' and to make 'better choices'. this model of 'consumer-citizen' is what the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other crusaders for globalization are promoting around the world. As in the marketplace where the better heeled customers get better services, so in the neo-liberal public sphere the better off and more educated 'customers-citizens'

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manage to get more choices, while bypassing the poor whose options actually shrink because they lack the cultural capital to be included in many middle-class neighbourhood associations and other civil society organizations. Recent evidence gathered by John harriss shows that in India, participation in civil society institutions is heavily skewed towards those with higher incomes and higher levels of education.

to sum up this section, neo-liberalism changes the texture of the state and civil society: it brings them both under the sway of hyper-capitalism. It assumes that accumulation of private profit is the highest social good that governments ought to promote and that the benefits of the markets will trickle down to all people. having clarified what the current wave of economic 'reforms' means, it is time to see their evolution in India.

India's Path to Neo-liberalism

how did India move from its days of Nehruvian socialism to where it is today? the year 1991 is seen by many as the watershed year in India's economic fortunes. that is the year when Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son and one-term prime minister (1984–89), was assassinated by a suicide bomber. that is also the year when the Congress-led government took the first steps to open up the Indian economy. since then, the country has followed the neo-liberal mantra of the four ds–'deflate, devalue, denationalize, and deregulate'.

Independent India's economic history can be divided up into three periods: the period of founding, from Independence in 1947 to the emergency in 1975; the period of experimentation, from the election of the Janata Party government in 1977 to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and the beginning of economic reforms in 1991; and the period of liberalization, from 1992 onwards up to the present.

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the first period (1947–75) was the period dominated by Jawaharlal Nehru's ideal of a planned economy in which the public sector was entrusted with the task of making India economically self-reliant in industry as well as in agriculture, while ensuring equitable growth and welfare of all segments of society. the three major areas which Indian planners focused on were: building industrial infrastructure so as not to be reliant upon imports; creating institutions of higher education which could produce the scientific and technical workforce needed for the economic take-off; and bringing about land reforms that would redistribute land to sharecroppers and landless agricultural workers. often characterized as 'socialist', Nehruvian policies were a far cry from the top-down socialism of the soviet Union and China. the softer, Fabian socialism of Nehru was not meant to destroy capitalism but rather to enable its take-off while trying to bring about a modicum of welfare and justice.

Regardless of what the critics say in hindsight, Nehru's industrial policy was not imposed on a reluctant capitalist class against their wishes or interests, nor was it meant to squelch private enterprise. on the contrary, it had the full support of the dominant coalition of India's major industrial houses, big farmers, professionals, civil servants, and other 'white-collar' workers: they understood that only the state had the wherewithal to create the required infrastructure for the economy to take off. Given the enormity of the problems confronting it, the Indian economy grew only at a relatively low rate of 3.5 per cent in this period. But by the end of the second and third Five-Year Plans (1956–61 and 1961–66), the import substitution model

had succeeded in laying the essential foundations of India's industrial structure.

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since it has become fashionable to heap scorn on Nehruvian socialists and advocates of planned economy, it is important to acknowledge their achievements, which were many. to list just some of them: by the early 1970s, India had achieved near total self-sufficiency in the standard capital goods required by domestic industry; India produced its own machine tools, chemical equipment, mechanical machinery, heavy and other electrical equipment, basic metals, and alloys. It had its own steel and power plants while developing its all important railway network, the most extensive in the world. these achievements laid the groundwork for all that was to come later.

throughout this period, from India's Independence to his death in 1964, Nehru, India's first prime minister, remained at the helm. After the short-lived government of Lal Bahadur shastri, Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi became the prime minister twice, first from 1966 until 1977 and then again, after the emergency, from 1980 until her assassination in 1984.

the first (i.e., pre-emergency) administration of Indira Gandhi is remembered largely for her left-of-centre ten-Point Programme which promised to eliminate poverty (*garibi hatao*). the programme enforced wide-ranging policy changes, including nationalization of banks and insurance companies, ceiling on urban property, restrictions on monopolies, public

distribution of foodgrains, land reform, improvements in productivity of agriculture (the Green Revolution), and other pro-poor but top-heavy policies. the justification for imposing greater state controls over economic enterprises was to ensure that banks and other financial institutions made resources available to small urban and rural enterprises.

these programmes were hugely popular among the poor, but Indira Gandhi faced opposition from within her own party. even though well intentioned, the increasing state controls

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on the economy created conditions for nepotism, corruption, and rent-seeking which largely benefited the middle-class bureaucrats and clerks. the Indian economy had already reached a level of maturity when private capital needed to take the lead which Indira Gandhi's top-heavy reforms did not allow. Moreover, the Indian economy had to confront the oil crisis and a severe drought in the early 1970s. on top of it all, in 1975, the Allahabad high Court found Mrs Gandhi guilty of election fraud. she responded to these multiple crises by imposing the infamous emergency.

this, in brief, is what was going on the economic and political fronts in India during the first phase which lasted for about 25 years after Independence.

It is illuminating at this point to look at the right-wing opposition to Nehru's state-managed capitalism. one came from the hindu nationalist parties, the other from the swatantra (or Freedom) Party. Many of the

ideas of the swatantra Party are coming back, now that the Indian politics and economy have shifted to the right of the centre.

For the most of this period, hindu nationalist organizations remained in the shadow cast by the murder of Mahatma Gandhi by one of their own: Nathuram Godse. Leaders of the Rashtriya swayamsevak sangh (Rss) and the hindu Mahasabha, the two veteran hindu nationalist organizations, moreover, preferred not to participate in electoral politics because they cast themselves in the role of cultural revolutionaries, concerned more with reinforcing the hindu foundations of Indian culture than with winning elections.

While they did not directly get involved in economic debates, hindu nationalist thinkers did manage to produce trenchant criticisms of the Nehruvian planned economy. they opposed the socialist spirit of the Indian economy from two angles: the first from the perspective of 'integral humanism' based upon the primacy of community, and the second from

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the perspective of a full-blown free market capitalism, based upon the primacy of the individual above all. Intriguingly, hindu ideologues would claim to find support for both of these contradictory ideologies in the sacred teachings of hinduism and hindu spirituality! Both of these ideologies are making a big comeback, with many new publishing houses, think tanks and their corporate supporters pushing for free markets within the purported civilizational

superiority of hinduism and its ideals of integral society.

the philosophy of integral humanism was most clearly

enunciated in 1965 by deendayal Upadhyaya, the first general secretary of the Jan sangh, the forerunner of today's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Integral humanism, along with hindutva, is still the official philosophy of the BJP and new members are required to swear an oath that they support this philosophy. While integral humanists attacked the commanding heights assigned to the state by the Congress socialists as alien and un-hindu, they did not embrace free market capitalism either. What they recommended was a 'third way' which was neither socialist nor capitalist but 'dharmic', with a distinct Gandhian touch of swadeshi or self-reliance.

According to Upadhyaya, it is hindu India's inherent,

inborn nature–or *chitti* , to use the appropriate sanskrit word —to integrate individuals into the organic whole, or the group mind. once so integrated, individuals do not need control from some external power like the state, nor do they fall prey to the selfish instincts of capitalists, for they are capable of limiting and controlling their desires and demands in the interest of the national community. What India needed was the cultivation of dharma, creation of men and women who would learn to see themselves as limbs of the body politic made up of the family, caste, guild, and the nation. Just as there can be no conflict between the limb and the body, there could be no conflict of interest between individuals born in

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different castes and classes and the rest of the society. this was to be India's very own 'third way' which reached beyond socialism and capitalism, both of which were declared to be alien to the hindu ethos. economic policy in India, like all other aspects of social life, was to be infused with hindu religious and moral values.

slowly but surely, hindu nationalists began to present this philosophy of integral humanism in the language borrowed from Gandhian socialism which celebrated swadeshi or self reliance. Gandhi's conception of swadeshi shared the essential core of integral humanist argument that economic policies adopted for national development must be guided by the cultural values of the Indian people, which were supposed to be communitarian, non-materialistic, or spiritual. In practical terms, it meant exaltation of the local and the national over foreign imports, a preference for small-scale, village-based industry over modern industrial production and an opposition to state ownership and control of economic activity. While this vision resonated with the memories of the swadeshi campaigns during the freedom struggle when people were exhorted to burn imported products in the streets, it failed to have much influence after Independence. economic and industrial policy in this phase continued to favour big, state controlled public enterprises.

But swadeshi was not the only argument against Nehru's state-heavy socialism. In the late 1950s through the 1960s, Nehruvian economics was also challenged by the swatantra Party which adopted the classical liberal position in defence of free markets with minimal government controls. since such well-known people like Narayana Murthy and Gurcharan das are trying to revive the old swatantra

Party, it will be useful here to take a closer look at its historical record.

the swatantra Party was founded in 1959 by C. Rajagopalachari, a veteran of the freedom struggle, a one-time

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associate of Gandhi (whose daughter married Gandhi's son) and an avowed social conservative. the core group was made up of K.M. Munshi, who had been active in hindu religious and cultural affairs and who founded the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan; the economist Minoo Masani, who was one of the founders of the Congress socialist Party before he became an ardent anti-socialist; the industrialist sir homy Modi, a very anglicized Parsi; along with a number of senior civil servants who had served in high positions under the British. (Incidentally, sita Ram Goel, the recently deceased founder of India's leading right-wing publishing house, Voice of India, and well known for his radical anti-Islamic and anti-Christian views, was a member of the swatantra Party. We will examine Goel's legacy in Chapter 4.) the party's membership also included traditional power-wielders like big landlords, and members of provincial royal families who stood to lose their thrones to the new republic. For all their avowed liberalism, the party also made electoral alliances with distinctly illiberal and obscurantist groups like the Ram Rajya Parishad, the hindu Mahasabha and the Jan sangh. Nehru, the *bête noire* of the swatantra Party, described it as belonging to 'the middle ages…the party of lords, castles, and zamindars which is becoming more and more fascist in outlook'.

What united this motley group of well-educated liberals, provincial rajas and ranis, and big landlords was their staunch opposition to a soviet-style planned economy which they feared was being introduced into India by the Congress Party under Nehru. the swatantra Party promised 'prosperity through freedom', and its 21-point manifesto declared its commitment to 'maximal freedom for the individual and minimal interference from the state'. In practical terms, 'minimal interference from the state' meant an opposition to land reforms, opposition to public sector involvement in industrial production, and support for lower taxes, low

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government spending, right to own property, and limits on the power of the government. In the political realm, the party stood for the Gandhian principle of trusteeship of the rich and the well born who were exhorted to use their privilege to serve the poor. All of this added up to a classical free market agenda, with the state reduced to the role of a night-watchman, with no role in redistribution of wealth.

By themselves, of course, there was nothing wrong with these classical liberal doctrines when the swatantra Party first espoused them—just as there is nothing wrong with them now when they are being revived. What we have learnt from the failure of state socialist experiments around the world is that without some mechanism for responding to market signals, and without some checks and balances, public sector institutions have a

habit of becoming inefficient, corrupt, and overbearing. At the same time, the case of the swatantra Party clearly shows the limits of economic liberalism divorced from the social and cultural realities of India. swatantra shows that liberalism can end up in bed with the worst kind of reactionary traditionalism when the very real problems of caste/class, inequality, and exploitation are resolved not in material terms, but in the realm of spiritual values of duty, harmony, and trusteeship.

swatantra was accused of harbouring communal, and even fascist tendencies in its own time. Looking back at it today, some scholars describe swatantra Party leaders as 'sympathetic to hindu nationalist ideology and active in hindu religious and cultural institutions'. But this is a misreading of what the party actually stood for. According to howard erdman, the author of the best-known study of the swatantra Party to date, the leaders of the party were neither abjectly reactionary nor militantly nationalistic… [it is an] error to call it a 'communal' party for it made no appeal to any communal or parochial interest…It is conciliatory

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towards Pakistan and its leaders have been solicitous of the interests of Muslims… swatantra is steadfastly secular and is committed to the observance of constitutional procedures. It is true that C. Rajagopalachari and K.M. Munshi were devout hindus and they introduced prayers and discourses on the Vedas and Bhagwat Gita at political meetings. But this public

display of religiosity was not shared by other members of the party, most of whom were secular minded and respected the principle of separation between public and private realms. they did not define the nation in religious terms, setting hindus against Muslims, as hindu nationalists are wont to. on top of it, they did not support the Gandhian economic agenda of promoting handicrafts and traditional technologies and instead stood for freedom of enterprise in the modernized industrial and agricultural sector. It is fair to call them 'moderate' (as erdman does) in their social and political convictions.

And yet, swatantra made political alliances with some of the most obscurantist and reactionary parties of its time, including the Ram Rajya Parishad, the hindu Mahasabha, and the Jan sangh. Why did the moderate liberals ally themselves with such obviously illiberal groups?

the key to this puzzle lies in the fact that while the swatantra liberals—much like neo-liberals of today—poured their bile on the evils and inefficiencies of state intervention in the economy, they did not pay even a fraction of the same attention to the illiberalism and injustice that is taken for granted in our cultural traditions. Because of their single minded obsession with opposing state-led socialism, swatantra liberals, as erdman correctly points out,

> did not speak out against the many suffocating influences of the old order, or against the dangers of freedom which lie on the right. Largely for this reason, the attacks on traditionalism

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which is implicit in the party's fundamental principles, is muted to the point of inaudibility…As long swatantra attacks only the left, it will represent a drastically truncated form of liberalism.

Far from speaking out against the 'suffocating influences of the old order', swatantra practically courted hindu traditionalist parties seeped in the old order. Why? Again, the reasons are important to understand for the sake of illuminating our present predicaments with neo-liberalism.

As swatantra members themselves realized, their great faith in the free market did not resonate with the masses, most of whom were desperately poor and welcomed the helping hand of the state they had elected. In order to win the masses to their side, without providing real solutions to the multiple inequities they were suffering from, the swatantra Party had no other option but to wrap itself in religion and adopt a warmed-over Gandhian talk of trusteeship. Unable or unwilling to take on the religious sources of injustice in India, swatantra tried to resolve these injustices at the spiritual level. they argued that the poor may be poor but traditional hindu society honour their spirituality. Individual enterprise, freed from the supposedly tyrannical government controls, would be guided by their high spiritual values and use their wealth for the common good. this was the defence of liberalism with an Indian face that the swatantra Party peddled. the fact that these same spiritual values had served as ideological cover for hierarchy and injustice did not bother these apologists of free enterprise.

to continue with the story, the swatantra Party made electoral alliances with the Jan sangh during the 1960s and ran on its free market platform without much success. If anything, its partnership with a party of rajas ended up

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giving the Jan sangh the reputation of being a party of haves against the have-nots. Partly as the result of its experience with swatantra, the current leadership of the sangh Parivar has learnt the art of covering its pro-globalization agenda in the Gandhian language of swadeshi.

Incidentally, the new incarnation of the swatantra Party, the brand new Liberal Party of India, established in 2005, is faced with some of the same ideological dilemmas that confronted its forerunner. the label 'moderate' fits the new party which wants to 'rid India of socialism and bigotry', as its website proudly proclaims. the new swatantraites, like their predecessors, don't have any obvious animus against Pakistan, Islam, or Muslims, and nor have they made any communal appeals. even though their writings often make references to hindu sacred books like the *Manusmriti* and *Arthashastra* in order to explain and bless the Indian spirit of enterprise for private gain, it is fair to say that their commitment to neo-liberal market reforms is motivated by a non-communal outlook. Later in this chapter, we will ask if the new swatantraites can avoid allying themselves with the religious right.

No discussion of ideological trends in this early phase can be complete without at least a mention of subramaniam swamy, a one-man squad championing free markets along with hindu revival. A harvard-educated economist, swamy (b. 1939) first joined the Jan sangh in

the 1960s but later quit to form the Janata Party and now directs a New delhi think tank called the Centre for National Renaissance and writes regular columns for *The Organiser,* the weekly newspaper of the Rss. swamy's agenda has been—and still is—to hitch economic development with hindu revival. Like his fellow travellers, he too took the obligatory dive into the Bhagvat Gita and the Vedas. But unlike those who found the hindu genius to be integralist, swamy declared the 'hindu ethos to be individualistic' and more

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hospitable to free markets and a minimalist state. the minimal state of swamy's dreams, however, is not so minimal that it would not actively support hindu revival: on the contrary he urged the Indian state to give up the 'Western nihilist' idea of secularism and actively promote hindu culture as the source of national unity and pride.

swamy's great plans for free markets along with hindu renaissance did not go anywhere when he first proposed them in the late 1960s–early 1970s. But swamy appears to be undergoing something of a renaissance himself. his new *Fundamentals of Indian Renaissance* published in 2005 tries to revive his failed *Agenda of Hindu Renaissance* which was reportedly dismissed by Indira Gandhi in 1969 as 'devised by a santa Claus'.

For all the bombast, the economic philosophy of the right, both in integral humanist and the swatantra garb, remained politically marginalized

through this phase of the founding of the Indian republic. What ended the Nehruvian era of self-reliant and inclusive economic growth was a combination of its own successes and failures. It is to the slow unravelling of the Nehruvian programme that we now turn.

Phase II: Experimentation, 1977–1991

this period began with the election, in 1977, of the first non Congress coalition party, the Janata Party. this was followed by the return of Indira Gandhi as prime minister in 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son, ascended to political power until his assassination in 1991. the mother–son duo set in motion many reforms which sought to undo the stringent regulations that had been put in place in the first phase by Mrs Gandhi's government.

By all accounts, the short-lived Janata Party government was quite inconsequential on matters of economic reforms and is remembered mostly for its inefficiency and corruption.

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the Janata Party was a coalition of non-communist political parties opposed to Indira Gandhi and the emergency. the coalition included the Bharatiya Jan sangh, the forerunner of the BJP, along with a number of other parties which had been a part of the movement for 'total revolution' started by the veteran socialist turned Gandhian, Jayaprakash Narayan, or JP, as he was called. It was the first time that an

openly hindu nationalist party like the Jan sangh had come to power at the Centre, albeit in a coalition.

the Janata Party shared the Gandhian and hindu traditionalist outlook of the Jan sangh. It sought to reverse the emphasis on big industry in favour of small, village-based industries and village councils (or panchayats). But all said and done, the real effect on industrial policy was rather minimal. the only added nuance was a greater emphasis on protecting urban small-scale producers and farmers.

the real burden of rationalizing and loosening some of the excessively rigid and constraining regulation was left to someone who was responsible for putting them there in the first place, namely, Indira Gandhi, and following her assassination, her son, Rajiv Gandhi.

In 1980, Indira Gandhi was swept back into power. It became clear even to her that the economy was under performing and controls on the private sector had gone too far. Indira Gandhi announced a new Industrial Policy in July 1980 which carried forward the piecemeal retreat from the highly restrictive regime that she had herself put in place during her first (pre-emergency) term in office. these reforms removed some restrictions on imports, allowed private industry to add more production capacity, and allowed firms to get bigger without the fear of anti-monopoly laws.

After Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, her son, Rajiv Gandhi, continued with the reforms. Unencumbered by the socialist or Gandhian thinking of the earlier generation,

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and more accepting of modern conveniences like personal automobiles and colour tV, Rajiv Gandhi promised to launch India into the 21st century by developing modern technology and by promoting managerial efficiency and economic competitiveness. this won him the allegiance of the urban middle classes who wanted access to Western the style consumption patterns. this elite-led deregulation of the 1980s further loosened restraints on the private sector, liberalized imports of consumer goods, and gave tax breaks to consumers so that they could afford automobiles and colour tVs which were assembled out of imported components. the result was a consumption boom led by the durable goods sector whose expansion surged from 8 to 22 per cent a year through the 1980s. overall growth rose to 5.6 per cent, well above the notorious 'hindu rate of growth' of 3.5 per cent in the previous years. external debt and payment on the interest on the debt grew to three times its size over the 1980s, from $23.8 billion to $62.3 billion. But this import-led

consumption boom was not matched by a corresponding rise of exports, a situation which led to a serious deficit of foreign currency reserves.

during an election rally in 1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a sri Lankan tamil suicide bomber protesting India's intervention in sri Lanka on behalf of the sinhalese. the piecemeal reforms initiated by the two Gandhis set the stage for a full-blown embracing of neo-liberal reforms which were put in place by P. Narasimha Rao who became prime minister in June 1991 when the Congress Party won the sympathy vote after the murder of Rajiv Gandhi.

Phase III: Neo-liberalism, 1991 Onwards

the year 1991 is to India's neo-liberals what 1989 is to soviet Bloc countries: it marks the end of the bad old days. Gurcharan

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das, India's most erudite neo-liberal, thinks of the 'golden summer of 1991' as 'India's second independence…an economic revolution…more important than the political revolution that Jawaharlal Nehru initiated in 1947'. the business lobbies, most of the mainstream media, free-market economists, and India's upwardly mobile urban middle classes have nothing but words of celebration and thanksgiving for the neo-liberal reforms that the Indian government initiated in 1991. Narasimha Rao, the Congress prime minister (1991–96), and Manmohan singh, his finance minister (and India's current prime minister), are hailed as revolutionary heroes who put India on a fast track to wealth and glory.

the 1991 reforms were a response to the trade deficit and depletion of foreign exchange reserves created by the elite-led consumption boom of the previous decade. this was compounded by the Gulf War in 1990 which raised the price of oil. Bad economic tidings led to capital flight, with many non-resident Indians withdrawing their savings out of Indian banks. that is when India went for a strings-attached, IMF–World Bank loan.

this loan became the pretext for a total overhaul of the state–economy relationship. As a condition for the loan, India was told to get the government out of the business of owning and running economic enterprises, curb

government subsidies, make its economy more market friendly, remove import restrictions, allow more foreign investment, and cut red tape—the standard conditions of IMF–World Bank loans.

But it would be wrong to see the reforms as some sort of neo-imperialist imposition on poor, hapless India. the situation was more complicated. the Indian industry and policymakers were not averse to these reforms. In fact, they welcomed them as the needed tonic that would release the animal spirit of money-making and entrepreneurship of Indians. According to the Columbia University economist

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Arvind Panagariya, who was working for the World Bank at the time, although the necessity to borrow from the IMF and World Bank had subjected the initial liberalization package to the conditionality of these institutions, the proposed reforms were 'essentially domestic in origin and reflected the consensus that had emerged among the Indian policymakers. Contrary to the assertions by many, the influence of the IMF and the World Bank was confined to the first set of actions. After the World Bank's structural adjustment loan (sAL) of december 1991, the Government of India was back in the saddle.'

the fact is that starting with Rajiv Gandhi's experiments with liberalization in the 1980s, Indian industry was anxious to break free from the kind of inward-looking and state managed economic path India had been

following. It was keen to break into export markets where it needed partnership with multinational corporations. Indian businesses were also keen to enter newer areas of the economy like telecommunications, financial services, stock trading, and such. thus the corporate sector of the country was practically itching to get rid of state regulations that prevented it from getting bigger and spreading into the global arena, alone or through foreign tie-ups.

Narasimha Rao and his finance minister, Manmohan singh, an oxbridge-educated economist, turned the IMF–World Bank conditionality into an opportunity for a complete makeover. Manmohan singh teamed up with P. Chidambaram, a harvard MBA, and Montek singh Ahluwalia, a renowned oxford-trained economist. the three of them went on a spree of deregulation, sometimes taking only hours to dismantle complex regulations that had taken years to formulate. Within a span of two years, they managed to loosen restrictions on monopolies; open the public sector institutions in banking, airlines, electric power, petroleum,

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cellular phones, etc. to the private sector; and open the country for foreign investment, allowing 'automatic entry' and majority ownership in 34 industries. to top it, they cut taxes on businesses and corporations; reduced excise duties; opened the capital markets to international investors; and allowed Indian companies to borrow and invest in foreign money markets.

All these reforms brought the Indian economy largely in conformity with the market fundamentalism of the IMF and the World Bank. All elements of the neo-liberal gospel – free trade, unfettered investments, deregulation, and privatization of publicly owned enterprises—were embraced by Indian policymakers. even though they kept paying lip service to the old socialist rhetoric of 'development with a human face' inherited from the Nehru era, Indian policymakers began to buy into new mantras that markets are good and governments are bad, and that there is no alternative to global markets. As we shall see below, this rosy assumption that a rising tide lifts all boats is not true anywhere, least of all in India where barriers to class mobility are exceptionally difficult to surmount.

despite the boost to the economy, the Congress lost the elections in 1996 and after a series of short-term governments, Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the BJP, the leading partner in the coalition government of the National democratic Alliance (NdA), became the prime minister on october 13, 1999.

For all its allegiance to swadeshi and the integral-humanist 'third way', the BJP-led NdA enthusiastically carried forth the neo-liberal reforms set in motion by the Congress government in 1991. When out of power, the BJP had distinguished between 'internal liberalization' (i.e., privatization) which it supported and 'external liberalization' (i.e. globalization) which it opposed in the name of protecting Indian businesses

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from foreign competition. But once in power, it gave up on protectionism and opened up important sectors of the economy including consumer goods, electricity generation, It-sector, and insurance industry, while liberalizing intellectual property laws. Perhaps most important of all, the BJP government took the lead in privatization of education at all levels, including colleges and universities. As we examine in more detail below, opening higher education to the private sector—including the religious sector—has created the infrastructure for a deeper hinduization of civil society.

the government had starting selling public enterprises

in 1991 in order to reduce fiscal deficit. But gradually, disinvestment took on a life of its own. the BJP-led NdA government declared that disinvestment was no longer a choice but an imperative, and established a full-fledged Ministry of disinvestment with Arun shourie, a well-known journalist and hindutva sympathizer, in charge. overall, the NdA government made it easier for bigger chunks of more and more sectors of the economy to be sold to private businesses, Indian or foreign. except for nuclear power, defence, and railways, everything else was declared 'non-strategic' and therefore eligible for privatization. And yet, for all the claims of 'India shining', the NdA lost the 2004 elections. A coalition government (United Progressive Alliance) led by the Congress took control. the party chose Manmohan singh, the architect of neo-liberalism, as the new prime minister. Under the UPA, the country has continued with the economic policies it embraced in 1991 with mixed results—higher GdP growth, deepening inequities, and sliding human development when measured by the United Nation's human development Index (down to 132nd in 2009 from an already pitiful 127th).

the 2009 general election came in the midst of a worldwide crisis of capitalism, the kind not seen since the Great 40

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depression of 1929. the Americans, who for so long were treated as consumers of last resort who would buy goods and services from the rest of the world, started to drown in debt. As a result, the housing market crashed, taking down major multinational investment houses and banks, all of whom had invested in the Us mortgage market. the ripple effects are being felt all across the world: workers are being laid off everywhere as the global consumer demand declines, bank loans freeze up, and new investments are not forthcoming. every tenet of the neo-liberal dogma—that unfettered markets are good and government regulation is bad, or that globalization is good and national priorities are bad—is now being questioned.

the Indian economy is hardly immune from the crisis.

the recent economic data is grim. the country's gross domestic product fell to 5.3 per cent during the last quarter of 2008, down from 8.9 per cent in the same time period in 2007. the economy lost half a million jobs in the final four months of 2008. export sector jobs—from traditional exports of garments, diamonds, gems and jewellery to the modern It and financial sector—have suffered deeper cuts. But the non-exporting sectors—real estate, construction, automobile industry, for example—have not been spared. According to a recent *New York Times* report, the only industry that is

showing signs of growth is the private security sector which is hiring close to a million employees to keep the riff-raff out of shopping malls, corporate office parks, apartment blocks, and even public transportation in India's urban areas. the already deep class distinctions are expected to get deeper still. And yet, the Congress-led UPA won the 2009 elections: it appears that the electorate voted for stability and whatever little the government did for the *aam aadmi* (ordinary man). the UPA's victory is expected to hasten even more radical pro-market reforms. Neo-liberalism is here to stay.

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Growing inequality

When sociologists of religion try to understand the changing patterns of religious faith in a society, they tend to concentrate on the socio-economic profile of the population. they assume that when people grow up in conditions where their survival is not secure, they tend to be more religious. It makes sense, therefore, for us to begin our enquiry into the changing nature of hindu religiosity under neo-liberalism by first looking at the changing distribution of wealth. some, or even most, readers may already be familiar with the data and analysis provided below. But it will be useful to start with a panoramic view of the political economy before we narrow our focus to take a fine-grained picture of the religious landscape.

Nearly a quarter century into the so-called reforms, there

isn't much of a trickle-down of wealth, nor a pull-up of the poor through growth of gainful employment. If anything, the growing prosperity of the middle-and upper-income groups depends upon the growing impoverishment of the rest. In the words of Amit Bhaduri, a well-known Indian economist, 'growing inequality is driving growth, and growth is fueling further inequality'.

Consider the following two sets of evidence:

• India is rising in the Forbes global ranking of billionaires, while sliding in the United Nation's global ranking of human welfare. In 2008, there were 53 dollar-billionaires (that is, those with rupees equivalent of 1,000,000,000 Us dollars) in India, up from 40 in 2007 and nine in 2004. India is home to more billionaires today than any other Asian country, more than China and Japan. then there are the millionaires: the Merrill Lynch/Cap Gemini report says that India's population of millionaires grew by 20 per cent in 2007 to 100,000. that rate of growth was more than

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twice the growth of millionaires in the Us. A substantial chunk of this wealth has already found its way into secret tax havens abroad. Recent reports have revealed that out of the $2.2 trillion secretly stowed away in swiss

banks, $1.45 trillion belongs to Indians. India tops the list of five countries (including Russia, Britain, Ukraine and China) with largest secret accounts in swiss banks. But at a time when great fortunes are being amassed, India is backsliding on the human development Index, or hdI, which measures well-being along three dimensions of health, education, and income. According to the figures compiled by veteran journalist P. sainath, from an already pathetic rank of 124 (out of 177 nations) in 2000, India fell to 127 in 2001, 128 in 2007, and 132 in 2008. these are dismal numbers, which put India not among the club of superpowers where it wants to belong, but among some of the most impoverished countries in the world: at 128, India was just behind equatorial Guinea (127), and just ahead of solomon Islands (129). Incidentally, India ranks far worse than its closest competitors. According to the 2007 *Human Development Report* , Brazil stood at 70, Russia at 67, and China had an hdI of 81 (an amazing improvement from 99 in 2000).

- While there have been many surveys to track poverty in India, they have gotten mired in methodological debates.

But, to quote from one of the most respected studies by Angus deaton and Jean dreze, 'the broad picture

emerging…is one of sustained poverty decline in most states and also in India as a whole'. But it appears that the poor only move from being 'extremely poor' and 'poor' to joining the sea of hard-working poor who make up the unorganized sector of the economy. Although above the official poverty line, this segment of the Indian population —as many as 836 million men, women, and

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children in 2004–05 – lives on only Rs 20 (or half a Us dollar) per day, and without even a semblance of a social security net.

there are built-in reasons why India's economic growth has not— and will not— trickle down any time soon. Most of the growth is taking place in the It-enabled services sector which requires the kind of cultural capital—fluency in english, familiarity with Western businesses and cultural norms —that is not readily available to the masses. Manufacturing —the sector which has traditionally absorbed non-college educated, unskilled workers and put them on the path to middle-class wages—makes up only 16 per cent of India's GdP. (Comparable figure for China is 35 per cent.) this sector is experiencing a relatively jobless growth due to growing automation and the recent economic downturn.

these figures tell only a part of the story. India has witnessed a massive land-grab by the private sector, aided and abetted by the state in the name of development—a process that has been dubbed 'developmental terrorism'. Using the power of eminent domain, the central and state governments have been buying agricultural and tribal land and literally giving it away to the corporate sector to set up factories, mines, special economic zones, private for-profit hospitals, colleges, and universities—and as we shall see in the following chapters, temples, ashrams, and 'research institutes' that propagate traditional 'science' of astrology, yoga, and Ayurveda. Regrettably, the Communists have been as complicit in this land-grab as the more pro-liberalization parties: Nano, the much-hyped, low-cost car was originally planned to be manufactured in a factory built upon 997 acres of fertile farmland that was practically gifted to the tata Group by the Communist Government of West Bengal. Violent protests by peasants and their supporters forced tata

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Motors to move the plant to the sate of Gujarat. dispossession of the poor has become a necessary factor in the creation of riches.

the poor in the countryside, in small towns, and in the

slums of big cities suffer not only from direct dispossession but from neglect and cutbacks in public sector employment. With the public sector shedding jobs, and the organized corporate sector more or less closed to them for the lack of high-tech skills and

cultural capital, the vast majority eke out a living in the unorganized, or informal, sector. Government's own data collected by the National Commission for enterprises in the Unorganized sector (NCeUs) shows that out of India's total labour force of over 458 million in 2005, 86 per cent, or 395 million, were in the unorganized sector, either self employed (shopowners, street vendors, hawkers, craftsmen), or working for wages as casual labourers, domestic servants/ housemaids, farmhands, etc. Most of the job growth sparked by globalization has taken place in this segment of non unionized, informal workers both in the organized and unorganized sector of the economy.

this vast army of informal workers has no welfare floor below which they are not allowed to fall, and no exploitation ceiling beyond which they cannot be squeezed. their relationship with the employers is regulated not by legal contracts but by traditions, enforced by religion and custom. their labour is extracted by what Barbara harriss-White calls 'compulsions of assetlessness, clientelage, beck-and-call contracts, debt mediated labour attachment [or servitude], but also through the social structure of gender, religion, caste…'

In the informal economy, the adverse effects of neo liberalism are felt in an inverse proportion to one's standing in the socio-economic order: those who are lowest in the scale are most badly hit. two of the most vulnerable and large segments of the Indian population—dalits and Muslims—are

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a case in point: as many as 88 per cent of dalits and 84 per cent of Muslims make a living in the informal or unorganized sector. even the government admits that 'they have remained poor at a bare subsistence level without any job or social security, working in the most miserable, unhygienic, and unliveable conditions throughout this period of high economic growth since the early nineties'.

Yet, influential voices are emerging that celebrate market reforms as liberating for dalits. Chandra Bhan Prasad, a columnist for *The Pioneer,* has taken the lead in encouraging dalits to join, rather than resist, the new market economy. In 2002, Prasad and like-minded intellectuals and activists brought out their manifesto for dalit capitalism called the Bhopal declaration. It called upon the government and the captains of industry to 'democratize capitalism' by enabling dalits to enter the market economy. to that end, the Bhopal declaration calls for a public–private partnership to provide new marketable education for dalits and for American-style affirmative action in the corporate sector. Proponents of dalit capitalism point to the rising levels of consumption and wages among dalits as a result of the tightening of labour markets in some parts of the country as evidence that capitalism is breaking the back of the caste system.

there is only one problem with this vision: it is a fairy tale. In India, capitalism is not dissolving the existing caste relations but rather using them to maintain a vast army of workers who can literally be at the beck and call of employers for pathetically poor wages and without any social security. While there might be some local tightening of labour markets which may help dalits and other backward castes to

improve their bargaining power, the fact remains that 'being a "scheduled Caste" makes a person twice as likely to be a casual labourer in agriculture, and poor'.

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In many ways, Muslims in India are faring much worse than even the dalits. they are largely self-employed—only 13 per cent of the entire Muslim population has salaried jobs in public or private enterprises, with barely 5 per cent of public sector jobs going to Muslims. the recent sachar Committee report found that globalization has hit the Muslim workers harder than other communities. Many of the traditional occupations of Muslims in industries such as silk, weaving, leather, and garment making have been hurt by cheaper imports from China. there are industries like gem cutting and brass work which are experiencing large growth in exports, but the benefits are mostly going to the hindu owners of these enterprises.

to sum up: the rising tide is not lifting all boats!

Privatization of Education

the sale of public sector institutions to private investors was justified, at least in part, by the promise that once the state gets out of the business of running hotels and making and selling bread, television sets, and telephones, it will have more resources for social services like education and health. But that is not what has happened. on the contrary, education, especially higher education, has become one more area which

the state is disinvesting from, leaving the field open to private enterprise often in partnership with the state.

the per centage of GdP the government spends on education and health care has remained almost constant, or declined, even as the revenues have grown. the most recent budget (2008–09) clearly displayed the 'tax less, and spend even less', spirit of neo-liberal philosophy. even as the revenues grew by 15 per cent over the previous year, the budget for elementary education went up by only 7 per cent, barely enough to keep pace with inflation and falling below

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the 6 per cent of GdP promised by the UPA government. even while the government coffers are awash with money, spending on education has hovered between 3 and 4 per cent of the GdP, with only half of it going to primary and secondary schools.

the despair-driven, *de facto* privatization of primary schools is well-known and much written about. Public schools have fallen into such disrepair that even slum dwellers prefer to send their children (especially sons) to english medium private schools. Private, for-profit schools catering to the children of the very poor for a fee have sprung up all over the country, even in small towns and remote villages. Critics point out that rather than improve the dismal conditions of public schools, the government—with the complicity of the middle classes who have been quietly but steadily seceding from public services – has decided to let them rot to death. even the Right to education Bill of 2008 has accepted the

reality that the right to education means a 'right' to unequal and inferior education. the ideal of creating a common school system is all but dead.

higher education is the new frontier for privatization.

today, any registered society, a public trust, or a company registered under the Companies Act of 1956, can set up an educational institution and then either get the state to simply pass a bill declaring it a university, or get the educational bureaucracy (the University Grants Commission [UGC]) to 'deem' it a university. once it gets the coveted status of a university, it can set its own standards for admissions and fees, decide the content of the courses, and choose its teaching methods. Above all, once deemed, a teaching shop gets the right to confer degrees—and make money through fees and 'donations'. In theory, of course, some minimum standards set by the UGC have to be met, but that is not much of an impediment, especially when it comes to injecting religion

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into the curricula. Under the previous BJP administration, the UGC had already approved BA-and even MA-and Ph.d.- level courses in subjects like Vedic astrology and had pushed for courses in vastu shastra and karmakanda. (despite its promises to desaffronize education, the UPA government has not been able to put an end to these obscurantist courses, in part because in 2004 the supreme Court gave the green light to teaching astrology in colleges and universities.)

Later in the book, we will provide evidence to show that privatization is not just turning higher education into a business; it is opening it to the business of God and god-men as well. the regulatory changes that are allowing private, for-profit teaching shops to enter higher education are also paving the way for religious endowments, ashrams, gurus to move into the business of conferring degrees in priestcraft and astrology, and otherwise setting up modern institutions with a traditionalist bent. But first it is important to get a better understanding of the larger picture. Consider the following statistics:

- In 2000, India had only 21 completely privately owned (i.e., unaided by government), not-for-profit institutions that had been 'deemed', or declared, to be universities. the number jumped to 70 in 2005, and to 117 in 2007. Nearly all the new universities created after 1998 have been privately owned. even though many are registered as philanthropic trusts and get tax-breaks for their 'non-profit' status, in reality they are nothing more than teaching shops which charge exorbitant sums of money disguised as 'donations' for entry, especially into engineering, medical, and business schools.
- the total number of private colleges, including professional engineering and medical colleges, shot up from 5748 in 1990 to 16,865 in 2003, a net increase of 11,117 new colleges in about a decade.
- In 2003, 86.4 per cent new engineers were

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private colleges, as compared to only 15 per cent in 1960. Likewise, the share of private medical colleges went up from 6.8 per cent in 1960 to 40.9 per cent in 2003.

- there is a push to allow foreign educational institutions to offer degrees either independently or through collaboration with any already established institution in the country. the bill that would have allowed foreign universities to set up campuses in the country was drafted in March 2007, but has been stalled due to political opposition. In the meantime, at least 130 foreign educational institutions, mostly from the Us and the UK, have forged partnerships with local, mostly unaccredited, private institutions. Many of these are fly-by-night operations, offering degrees which are not recognized in the countries of origin.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with allowing private sector entities to set up institutions of higher education. After all, world-renowned universities like harvard, Yale, stanford, MIt, and the University of Chicago are private institutions. In principle, one could also argue that the private sector should step in to meet the enormous unmet demand for higher education that clearly exists in the country. even though India has one of the largest number of colleges and universities in the world, they barely provide for about 10 per cent of college-age students. (In contrast, China enrolls nearly 20 per cent of college-age youth and in the Us, more than 80 per cent attend college.)

the problem with this reasoning is that it ignores the

ground realities of India. those who argue for privatization accept the World Bank's orthodoxy that the government should concentrate on primary and secondary education —which was seen as equality enhancing—and leave college and university education to the private sector. In 1997, the Government of India accepted this logic and declared

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education beyond primary level a 'non-merit' good. It argued that subsidies for higher education were unfair and favoured the rich who should be made to pay for college degrees with their own money.

But it is simply not the case that the benefits of public sector subsidies for higher education, meagre though they have been, have accrued only to the rich. If it were not for government subsidies, the first generation of college graduates among women and discriminated castes and tribes that we find in India today would not be there. As devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta have pointed out:

> there is absolutely no doubt that marginalized groups have been given much greater access to education as a result of government subsidies. the ratio of male to female students in higher education dropped form 8.29:1 in the 1950s to almost 1.5:1 by the late 1980s and is continuing to drop…parents are more likely to incur private expenditure for sons rather than daughters…Another point of evidence against the

proposition
that education subsidies go largely to the privileged is the increase
in enrollment of India's most marginalized social groups, namely
scheduled Castes (sC) and scheduled tribes (st): the ratio of
general to sC/st students in professional education has dropped
from almost 12:1 in the late fifties to 8:1 during the late eighties.

despite the facts on the ground, support for commercialization of higher education has continued to grow. Under the BJP- led NdA government, higher education was practically offered on a silver platter to India's corporate tycoons. the government invited Mukesh Ambani and Kumar Mangalam Birla, scions of India's leading business families, for advice on the education policy. With the larger aim of producing 'knowledge workers' of the 21 st century rather than industrial workers of yesteryears, Ambani and Birla

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recommended deregulation and privatization of all education, except for the humanities, liberal arts, and performing arts. Government's role in higher education was reduced to insuring the student loan industry which would enable students to pay the asking price for their degrees.

Commercialization of education is backed by legal rulings.

In its 2002 judgment in the *TMA Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka* , the supreme Court gave its blessings to for-profit private colleges and universities. In a creative interpretation of the

constitutional right (Article 30) of minority religious and linguistic communities to set up their own educational institutions in accordance with their own norms and values without being denied grants from the state, the supreme Court decided that private educational institutions must have the same rights. In addition, the courts redefined profits as 'reasonable surplus' and allowed private colleges to set their own fee and admission criteria.

Privatization does not mean an end to saffronization of education. Injection of hindu traditionalism into apparently modern curricula takes place through the perfectly innocuous sounding objective of imparting 'value education'. the private sector is not at all averse to the idea of value education, even in tertiary level science and engineering colleges. If anything, 'blending' the best of Western knowledge with Bharatiya (read hindu) values has become a part of their sales pitch.

While it looks harmless, value education has been the favoured vehicle of traditionalists of all political parties to inject an uncritical adulation of India's hindu heritage into school curricula. the BJP-led NdA government rewrote the national curriculum in 2000 which was rightly criticized for saffronizing school education. But the new 2005 National Curriculum Framework crafted by the secular UPA government has also given its blessings to introducing all kinds of obscurantisms in the guise of respecting the 'local knowledge' and 'innate

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wisdom' that students bring with them into the classroom. Using a postmodernist argument that there is no one truth, but just so many different versions of knowledge, the new curriculum advises teachers to teach both local knowledge and scientific principles and let the students create their own meanings out of both systems. there is nothing to prevent spiritual or religious knowledge from being accommodated within the various possible versions of knowledge, and thereby surreptitiously bringing religion into school instruction.

Privatization in the realm of political economy, and relativism in the realm of ideas seem to go well together.

opening education to the private sector while relaxing

oversight on course content has created conditions for hinduization of higher education. the kind of hindu-centrism of culture that the BJP-led government could not accomplish through legislative means is now being accomplished through privatization of education. (the next two chapters will provide evidence to support this claim.)

Superpower Swadeshi: Selling Globalization

In the face of the deepening inequity and the growing sense of insecurity, the natural question is how is this model made palatable to the masses? how are political parties trying to sell disinvestment, privatization, and globalization to the people whose approval, after all, they have to seek every five years or so in state and national elections?

the issue of public consent became important only after

reforms moved from the elite phase when the debate was still among academics and policymakers, into the mass phase (from the

mid 1990s onwards) when ordinary people began to feel the impact of liberalization. For most of the mass phase of liberalization, the BJP-led NdA government was at the helm (1998–2004), followed by the Congress led UPA government.

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Both parties have gradually redefined the old Gandhian ideal of swadeshi or self-reliance to mean *whatever will make India powerful on the world stage.* Gradually one hears less and less of swadeshi, and more and more of superpower dom.

the superpower talk began to be heard more frequently after the nuclear tests the BJP government carried out in 1998. the tests were interpreted as giving a huge boost to India's prestige on the world stage. According to Rob Jenkins, the BJP promised to replicate the same boost in prestige in the economic sphere as well:

> In BJP's vision…globalization became the site in which India will take up her rightful place in the international community; just as this has been accomplished in the global security field with the nuclear tests in 1998, so will India's It expertise and business acumen allow India to thrive in the global economic field as well.

A representative example of the rhetoric of superpower swadeshi is the following statement from Jaswant singh, the finance minister under the NdA government:

Look at what is happening in the knowledge industry…we are reaching out the world and registering our presence through globalization. today the Indian entrepreneur is celebrated. Look at tata buying daewoo. Reliance buying Flag. Research is moving out. Pharma is moving out. Indian companies are moving out and getting globalized. *This is swadeshi* . (emphasis added)

By now, all parties use the promise of superpower status in their electoral pitches. even the swadeshi Jagran Manch, the sangh Parivar's watchdog against foreign capital, has bought into this vision. s. Gurumurthy, the leader of the

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swadeshi Jagran Manch, for long a fiery critic of foreign multinationals, now supports 'calibrated globalization [as] the vehicle for acquiring global economic strength', while sitting on the board of directors of Indian First Foundation, a think tank that pushes for globalization from a hindutva point of view.

But there is opposition to privatization and globalization from within the hindutva ranks, especially from the labour union aligned with the Rss (Bharatiya Mazdoor sangh [BMs]) and from small manufacturers who are not able to compete against cheaper imports (mostly from China). there is also considerable, and often violent, opposition to Western cultural imports (Valentine's day celebrations, beauty pageants, and pubs, for example) by the more militant sections of the sangh Parivar. the BJP tacitly supports those who commit these acts of vandalism, but at the same time, it takes pains to distance itself from them in public so as not to offend its

growing constituency among the middle classes.

there are two other elements of ideological discourse which are more unapologetic in their defence of free markets. the first comes from those who share the communalist agenda of the sangh Parivar, while supporting an individualistic interpretation of hinduism. Prominent and influential among them include subramaniam swamy, a maverick politician economist we encountered in an earlier section, and Arun shourie, a well-known public figure who served as the disinvestment minister for the NdA. one can also include here Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat, who has become the darling of industrialists and businessmen from the world over. those who share this orientation can be called hindutva neo-liberals.

the second group is made up of those trying to stake out a secular (or at least non-hindutva) right-wing party which would eschew the divisive anti-Muslim and anti-Christian

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agenda of the BJP and the Rss and popularize classical liberal positions on individual rights and freedoms, small government and religion–state separation—a sort of modern day swatantra Party. those who share this orientation can be safely described as non-hindutva neo-liberals.

hindutva neo-liberals are the closest ideological cousins

of American religious neo-conservatives—the so-called 'theocons' – who justify their fervent American nationalism and their ardent admiration of capitalism in a theological world view derived from the natural law tradition of Roman Catholicism.Unlike the mainline Protestant denominations who accept (at least in principle) the fundamental American creed of church-state separation, American theocons see the very idea of a secular society as an abomination and the primary source of the cultural pathologies of American society. theocons, who have provided the philosophical justification for George W. Bush's so-called 'faith-based initiatives', insist that Christian faith is the precondition for the American nation and a prerequisite for the functioning of capitalist free markets.

the idea of hinduism as the precondition for the Indian

nation and a prerequisite for the proper functioning of Indian capitalism is the ideology of the Indian theocons, or hindutva neo-liberals. the ideas of subramaniam swamy are illustrative of this position. When swamy proposed the marriage of hindu renaissance and *laissez-faire* capitalism in the 1970s, he was laughed off. But the same ideas, repackaged in various columns and blogs, are finding new audiences at home and among the NRI community abroad.

swamy promises that India will become a global superpower by 2025 provided Indians develop the political will to dismantle all aspects of Nehruvian socialism and secularism, reduce the state to merely providing the infrastructure and the policies for private sector to flourish at the rate of 10 per cent GdP

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growth per year, and align their interests with the strategic interests of the Us and Israel. But while necessary, all these economic and foreign policy reforms are not sufficient.

What is needed is a 're-throning' of sanskritic hinduism in the hearts and minds of the masses (Muslims and Christians included), schools, government, and business enterprises of hindustan (his preferred name for India). economic superpower-dom will only come if it is accompanied with a hindu renaissance:

> India becoming a global economic power is not enough. to get
> her due place in the world order, India must become thoroughly
> united with a virile mindset without self doubt and undergo a
>
> [hindu] renaissance to cleanse the dirt and unwanted baggage
> acquired over the past thousand years.

Interestingly, while swamy and his fellow hindutva neo-liberals want the state to get out of the way of private enterprise, they want the state to use public resources to actively promote a renaissance of hinduism. In other words, the state has to have a minimal role in economic affairs, but maximal role in propagation of hinduism. the state is exhorted to teach the 'correct' reading of history which makes India the homeland of the Aryans and to bring science and hindu spiritualism together in classrooms in order to promote an Indic model of education. All Indians, regardless of their own religious beliefs and traditions, are asked to accept this 'scientific spiritualism' as a part of their own ancestry. (here again, the parallels with the religious right in the Us are quite striking. Conservative evangelical and Catholic groups have shown no compunctions in using the power of the Bush White house to enact socially

conservative laws on matters of reproductive rights, stem cell research, and faith-based initiatives, while fully

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supporting the massive cutbacks in government support for public welfare.)

Let us turn now to the non-hindutva neo-liberals. After their disappointment with the BJP's complicity in the anti Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002, many among the free market enthusiasts began to seriously think of reviving the old swatantra Party. two of India's biggest information technology tycoons have expressed their support for such a project. Jaithirth (Jerry) Rao, the founder Ceo of Mphasis, a Bangalore-based It and outsourcing firm, has been arguing for the creation of a new party on the lines of swatantra that will not hide behind populist nostrums, but offer a *khullam khulla* (open and unapologetic) defence of free markets. Narayana Murthy, the founder-Ceo of Infosys, India's best known software company, is reported to be 'willing to put up as much as four billion rupees of his own money' to revive the old swatantra Party and run for elections on its platform. Gurcharan das, who has emerged as a very influential voice among neo-liberals, has urged the formation of a new party that will:

> put economics above political matters, and trust markets rather than bureaucrats. It will do what no party has done so far—it will sell economic, social, and administrative reforms to the people…Finally it will work to confine religion to the private space, keeping it away from the public space.

the admirers of swatantra are well aware that the chances of such a party actually winning elections are quite slim. that is why they seem to be ready to settle for the second best option—to start a movement which, in partnership with think tanks and NGos, will take on the task of defending free market, pro-growth solutions in the public sphere. one can see the beginnings of such a movement in the emergence

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of think tanks like the delhi-based Centre for Civil society, the formation of *The Indian National Interest* , a consortium of bloggers which brings out a monthly magazine, *Pragati,* and the increasing visibility of neo-liberal positions in editorial and opinion pages of english language newspapers. only time will tell what real impact these efforts will have on electoral politics in the country.

But the neo-swatantraites seem to be making the same errors that led the old swatantra into the arms of the hindu right. Like their predecessors, neo-swatantraites simply have only the mantra of trickle down to offer to those at the receiving end of the deeply entrenched inequalities in India. they, like their predecessors, concentrate their fire on the sins of government intervention while ignoring and soft-pedalling the religious sources of hierarchical ways of thinking that are deeply ingrained in Indian culture. take, for example, their willingness to work with the BJP when it was in power before the BJP's complicity in what happened in Godhra finally disillusioned them. the BJP by no

means, subscribes to the kind of philosophical liberalism based upon respect for the rights-bearing individual. the BJP's conception of a minimal state is premised on the fundamental correctness of a self-regulating caste society. While to their credit, neo-liberals have denounced the venomous communalism of the BJP and the sangh Parivar, they have not taken the trouble to engage with the illiberal world view of integral humanism (which is the worldview of a caste society) which still constitutes the common sense of the Indian society. As long as Indian liberals do not actively challenge the illiberal world view of hindu traditionalism, they run the risk of co-opting and getting co-opted by the hindutva neo-liberals. Unless they actively take on the challenge of creating a new secular culture, their talk of confining religion to the public space will remain hollow.

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Conclusion

this chapter is an overview of the political-economic context that India finds itself at the beginning of the 21 st century. It traces the history of how the Indian elite stopped worrying about Nehru–Gandhi ideas of national self-reliance and came to love the global markets.

While fully acknowledging that the Indian economy needed reform of the excessively interventionist state, this chapter exposes the dark side of India's so-called economic miracle. It lays bare the structural features of the Indian economy which shut out the vast majority of workers from the gains of the new

economy. It also looks at the growing commercialization of education, especially higher education, which is a key to acquiring the cultural capital needed to participate in the new economy. Last but hardly the least, this chapter highlights the growth of national pride which often expresses itself in dreams of superpower status.

It was crucial to dwell on this new political economy in order to understand better the changes that are going on in the religious landscape of India. It is to these changes in popular hindu religiosity that we now turn.

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2

The Rush Hour of the Gods: Globalization and Middle-class Religiosity

the world today is as furiously religious as it ever was…

experiments with secularized religions have generally failed;
religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with

reactionary supernaturalism have widely succeeded.
Peter Berger

Indians have never been, and will never be “other worldly”.
their spiritualism, though lofty in its metaphysics, is mostly a

means to harness divine support for power and pelf.
Pavan Varma

those looking for evidence to back Peter Berger’s verdict cited above that ‘the world today is as furiously religious as it ever was...[and that] beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism have widely succeeded’, can do no better than to take a closer look at the religious landscape of India, the crouching tiger of the 21st century global capitalism.

India today is teeming with millions of educated, relatively well-to-do men and women who enthusiastically participate in global networks of science and technology. the Indian economy is betting its fortunes, at least in part, on advanced research in biotechnology and te drug industry, whose very existence is a testament to a thoroughly materialistic understanding of the natural world. And yet, a vast majority of these middle-class beneficiaries of modern science and technology continue to believe in supernatural powers supposedly embodied in idols, divine men and women,

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stars and planets, rivers, trees, and sacred animals. By all indications, they treat supernatural beings and powers with utmost earnestness and reverence and go to great lengths to please them in the hope of achieving their desires. hindus are not the only ones who are becoming more religious —data shows that all the many religious communities of India are showing signs of growing religiosity. But since this book is about hindus who make up the majority, we will be looking mostly at how the expressions of hindu religiosity are changing.

that a great many Indians of all religious faiths are taking their gods with them into the new economy is hardly surprising. In this, Indians are no different from people in other fast growing economies like Brazil, China, and Russia: all of these countries are experiencing an explosion of religiosity. Besides, there are industrially advanced countries like the Us which have always been highly religious. Contrary to classical theories of secularization, scientific, technological, and economic development does not invariably lead to a decline of religiosity. (We will look at these theories of secularization in the last chapter of this book and see if they help us explain the Indian experience of juggling with religion as it modernizes.)

however, what is noteworthy about the new religiosity of middle-class Indians is how openly ritualistic, ostentatious, and nationalistic it is. Unlike the previous generations that grew up on a mixture of Nehruvian exhortations for cultivating scientific thinking and the neo-Vedantic preference for a more cerebral, philosophical hinduism, the new hindu elite and middle classes revel in ritualism, idolworship, fasts, pilgrimages, and other routines of popular, theistic hinduism, sometimes mixed with new age spirituality. It is not that these more ritualistic expressions

of popular hinduism were entirely absent from the cultural milieu of the educated, middle to

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upper classes of the generations that came of age in the earlier, more 'socialist' and secular era. What has changed is that the ritualistic aspects have moved from the privacy of the home and family, to the public sphere, the domain of pride and prejudice, politics, and profits. What has also changed is that the educated elite don't feel that they have to defend their practices and beliefs against secularist finger-wagging (which has almost completely disappeared anyway). there is a new, unapologetic, and open embrace of religiosity in India today which wasn't there in, say, the first half of our sixty plus years as a republic.

overall, it seems fair to say that economic prosperity is

bringing with it a new 'rush hour of the gods' in India. the expression 'rush hour of the gods' was first used by h. Neill MacFarland back in 1967, in a book bearing this title, to describe the proliferation of new expressions of religiosity in Japan in the immediate aftermath of the second World War. It was a time when 'new religions rose like mushrooms after a rainfall', attracting millions of Japanese who were left battered after the war. the term 'rush hour' was supposed to signify the 'frenetic quality' of the mass-based, media-savvy popular religious movements that promised fulfilment of worldly goals through spiritual means to ordinary people.

today's India is obviously very different from post-war

Japan. the Japanese rush hour, moreover, referred more to new religious cults rather than revival or reinvention of the traditional shinto or Buddhist faith of the Japanese. Yet, one can legitimately speak of a rush hour of the gods in India, for the new religiosity displays that rather frenzied search for spiritual remedies for material concerns that characterized the Japanese case. Just like the Japanese religious movements were a response to turbulent and traumatic social change, the new Indian religiosity is in part a response to India's headlong rush into the global economy with all the attendant social

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and cultural dislocations. Moreover, the new middle-class religiosity in India bears distinct undercurrents of the kind of muscular cultural nationalism that the Japanese displayed before the second World War that left them defeated, and in despair.

there is no doubt that growing religiosity is, at least in part, a response to new socio-psychological needs created by neo-liberalism and globalization. But this turn to gods and faith was not inevitable, or unavoidable. It is not an unalterable law that all societies undergoing rapid change have to become more religious, for there are societies (especially in europe) that cope with change in relatively secular ways. Nor is it the case that Indians are innately more religious than any other people, for what often passes as religion in India is a cover for 'power and pelf ', to use Pavan Varma's words cited above.

Far from being inevitable, public expressions of hindu

religiosity are growing because they are being facilitated by the Indian state and corporate interests, often in a close partnership. despite the periodic panics about 'hinduism in danger', and despite the often heard complaint that the hindus face reverse discrimination in their own country, hinduism is doing very well. the Indian state and its functionaries operate on the unstated assumption that hinduism is not merely one religion among other religions of the Indian people, but rather the national ethos, or the way of life, that all Indians must learn to appreciate, if not actually live by. As a result, politicians and policymakers of all political persuasions think nothing of spending taxpayers' money and deploying public infrastructure for promoting hinduism in the guise of promoting Indian culture at home and abroad. In recent years, direct state and corporate sponsorship of expressly religious elements of hinduism (as opposed to artistic and cultural aspects) has become more blatant, as is evident from

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provision of public funding for yagnas, kathas, and yoga camps; matching grants for organizing religious festivals and pilgrimages; promotion of temple tourism and pilgrimage circuits; providing land and state-financed infrastructure for temples, ashrams and priest training schools; providing funds, physical infrastructure, and official credentials for training in Vedic astrology, vastu, and other elements of hindu priestcraft; and in some states, even directly paying the salaries of temple priests.

In addition, many of India's well-known family- owned business and industrial houses have a long history of contributing handsomely to building new temples and ashrams, and sponsoring religious events. In the absence of strong enough countervailing institutions and agencies that can offer secular alternatives to these well
funded initiatives, the public sphere in modern India has remained thoroughly intertwined with religious symbols and rituals of the majority religion.

We will unravel the workings of the state–temple–corporate partnership as we move along in this book. But this chapter has a rather modest aim: to describe the changing trends in popular everyday hinduism. too often these days, it is the radical religious-political or fundamentalist movements that get the bulk of attention, while the faith of ordinary believers who are not active participants of such movements remains unexamined. the chapter will try to fill the lacuna and focus on the religiosity of the emerging middle classes in India. Why the middle classes? they are the major beneficiaries of the neo-liberal reforms discussed in the previous chapter, and they are setting a new tone for the rest of the country when it comes to cultural trends and patterns of consumption. how their relationship with God and organized religion is changing as their socio-economic status is changing can tell us a great deal about the religious landscape of the rest of the country.

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Nearly a quarter century of neo-liberal economic policies have swelled the ranks—and bank balances—of a new middle class made up of white-collar workers in the new Internet enabled global service industry (It business office processing [BoP]), banking, accounting, insurance, hotels, tourism, etc.) Although numerically still much smaller than the old or traditional middle class of shopkeepers, businessmen, government officials, teachers, journalists, and landowning farmers, the new middle class is much admired for putting India on the global map as an emerging world power.

In one sense, India does not have a middle class, new or old. It is simply misleading to call 200 million or so buyers of Western-style consumer durables 'middle class' because they do not represent the statistical middle of the population. they are instead what Achin Vanaik calls 'an elite of mass proportion'—the top 20–30 per cent of the population surrounded by a sea of utter poverty.

how big is this so-called middle class? estimates vary. But the two most cited surveys put the numbers anywhere between 60 million and 300 million. According to the Indian National Council of Applied economic Research (NCAeR), the term 'middle class' applies to those earning between Rs 200,000 and Rs 1,000,000 annually. By this definition, about 6 per cent of 1 billion Indians—about 60 million people—were middle class in the year 2000–01, while close to 22 per cent 'aspiring classes' were expected to catch up in a decade or so. But if middle class-ness is measured by ownership of middle-class goods—telephones, motor vehicles (cars or two-wheelers), and colour tV—close to one-fifth of India was already middle class in 2007, as the state of the Nation survey by CNN-IBN revealed.

over and above income and assets, class is a matter of

taste

and style. the new Indian middle classes hold

europe, the Us 66

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states, Japan, and Australia as the benchmark for their taste in consumer goods and fashions. the very wealthy and the upper middle classes already have access to these lifestyles, while the lower middle classes aspire to get there. the older, more traditional segment of the middle classes, made up of government bureaucrats, public sector employees, family businesses, landed elite, on the other hand, is somewhat more ambivalent about Western fashions.

In matters of political beliefs and cultural values, the

middle classes have decidedly said 'No' to the socialist and rationalist elements of the Nehruvian legacy. But they have yet to formulate an alternative vision of a good society. the result is a somewhat confused and contradictory mishmash of professed ideals and actual values and deeds.

Going by the recent Pew Global Attitudes survey, the new

middle class in India is overwhelmingly pro free market: a solid 89 per cent of Indian respondents supported free trade, 73 per cent welcomed foreign companies, and a solid 76 per cent were in favour of free markets 'even though some people are rich and some are poor'. (Comparable figures for the Us, the bastion of unrestrained capitalism, are 59, 45, and 70 per cent respectively.)

these pro-market views, however, are not matched by a

strong sense of citizenship and social

responsibility. the idea that their own prosperity is linked to the well-being of the rest of society is accepted in theory, but belied in practice every day. Indian elite and middle classes display an exceptionally high degree of tolerance for the inhuman levels of poverty and deprivation all around them, a trait that could well derive from the hindu conception of karmic justice and the individualistic conception of salvation or moksha in hinduism. to be sure, when asked, an overwhelming proportion—92 per cent in the Pew poll—say they want the state to step in and help the poor. But in reality, Indian upper and middle

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classes have always preferred privatized services in schools, hospitals, transportation, garbage collection, and, down the list, over public goods that the poor can also benefit from. economists have shown that one sign of the overall apathy towards public goods is the relatively low contribution taxes made towards the total government revenue in India, even when compared to poorer neighbours like Pakistan and sri Lanka. As Chakravarti Ram-Prasad observed recently:

> [the haves in India]...do not, on the whole, extend a sense of solidarity to the poor; they often do not acknowledge the role of the state in their own rise or its capacity to solve any of the country's problems; and they are in general, politically apathetic.

the irony is that the majority of the fresh entrants to the new economy—software engineers, doctors, biologists, MBAs, and others—owe their success in large part to the highly

subsidized higher education made available by the same Nehruvian public sector undertakings that they now condemn. the new rich, in other words, are perfectly willing to kick the ladder they have clambered up on to get to where they are.

the new middle classes are ready to jettison another plank of the Nehruvian project—namely, secularism. An overwhelming majority—92 per cent in the Pew Global Attitudes survey mentioned earlier—claims that religion is very important to them. What is more, an overwhelming majority (90 per cent) claim that they want to keep God out of government. But their actions do not match their words: secularism as separation of state and the temple has never had much currency in India. the educated and privileged segments of Indian society have never shown even the faintest sign of resistance to the close involvement of elected leaders and

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government functionaries, *in their official capacity* , sponsoring and celebrating religious rituals in public. there is no sign of public protest against using government funds to support denominational schools, pilgrimages, yoga camps, yagnas, and kathas. the only time anyone gets agitated about state support for religion is when the religion in question is someone else's religion, especially the supposedly 'non-Indian' religions like Islam and Christianity. the many direct and indirect subsidies to the faith of the majority are accepted—and expected—as business-as-usual. Given its comfort with open expressions of hinduism

in the public sphere, it is not surprising that the middle-class share of votes for the BJP and its NdA allies has been growing through the 1990s, while its support for the Congress has been declining. Analysis of election data shows that both in 1998 and in 1999, the combined middle-class vote received by the BJP and its allies was more than what the Congress received from the same class.

Another cultural trait of Indian middle classes that is relevant to understanding their religiosity is their view of modernity and science. By and large, Indian middle classes see themselves as modern in the sense of having seen through and rejected blind faith. In this milieu, you are expected to at least appear to be scientifically correct, and reject the superstitions of the unlettered and the mumbo-jumbo of priests. But the scientific correctness of the new middle classes turns out to be the exact opposite of what the advocates of rationalism —or 'scientific temper' as it is called in India—have in mind.

Rather than cultivate a habit of critical thinking which subjects metaphysical assumptions of inherited traditions to a scientific challenge, educated Indians have shown a huge appetite for the pseudo-scientism being taught by neo-hindu philosophers, modern gurus, and the peddlers of new age spiritualism. All the metaphysical concepts of traditional hinduism—the existence of an all-pervasive, disembodied consciousness variously called atman, shakti, or prana;

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survival of the soul after death; reincarnation of the eternal soul in a new body; the existence of humours and innate essences in nature, or gunas; efficacy of yagnas in aligning human affairs with laws of nature; correspondences between the macrocosm (stars, planets, metals, directions, etc.), and the microcosm of human life—are accepted *as if* they are backed by scientific evidence. this kind of Vedic/hindu scientism seems to have a wide appeal for those who consider themselves to be educated and modern.

Re-ritualization of the 'Great Tradition'

the available survey data supports the general impression that globalization is proving to be good for the gods in India.

- According to the 2007 state of the Nation survey conducted by the Centre for the study of developing societies (Csds) for IBN-CNN– *Hindustan Times* , 'Among Indians, the level of religiosity has gone up considerably during the last five years. While 30 per cent said they had become more religious during the last five years, only 5 per cent mentioned in negative.'
- the same survey poll also found that education and exposure to modern urban life seems to make Indians *more,* not less religious: 'urban educated Indians are more religious than their rural and illiterate counterparts… religiosity has increased more in small towns and cities than in villages.'
- hindus are not the only ones becoming more religious. the 2007 state of the Nation survey shows that 38 per cent of Indian Muslims, 47 per cent of Christians, and 33 per

cent of sikhs, as compared to 27 per cent hindus, claim
to have become more religious in the last five years.

• Based upon the National election survey of

2004, the Csds 70

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team reported the following: 'We asked our respondents if
their involvement with religious activity had increased in
terms of attending religious functions, regular participation
in prayers, temple going, etc. over one-third respondents
said that religiosity had increased among their family

members…Among the educated, particularly among those
educated above secondary level, the proportion of highly
religious is higher. Among upper castes (27 per cent) and
peasant proprietary castes (25 per cent) the highly religious
are in high proportions (24 per cent). Both among hindus
and Muslims, the upper class persons are more religious
than the poor (26 per cent Muslim rich and 25 per cent
hindu rich are highly religious.) so religiosity may be a
pastime of the high and the rich!'

• the number of registered religious buildings in delhi grew from a mere 560 in 1980 to 2000 in 1987, with similar trends reported from other parts of the country.

• In his much-acclaimed book, *Being Indian*

(2004), Pavan Varma reports that around the turn of the millennium, the country had 2.5 million places of worship, but only 1.5 million schools and barely 75,000 hospitals. he bases this observation on the data from the 2001 census.

• Another measurable indicator of rising religiosity is the tremendous rise in pilgrimages. According to a recent study by the NCAeR, 'religious trips account for more

50 per cent of all package tours, much higher than leisure tour packages at 28 per cent'. the most recent figures show that in 2004, more than 23 million people visited the Balaji temple at tirupati, while 17.25 million trekked to the mountain shrine of Vaishno devi.

the phenomenon of rising religiosity in times of rapid technological modernization and economic growth is neither particularly new nor uniquely Indian: religions everywhere

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learn to adapt to, and coexist with, the infrastructure of modernity. But Indians are well known for being harmonious schizophrenics who live in many different worlds at the same time. Most educated Indians seem to switch effortlessly from the profane to the sacred, from the lab to the temple and back, without being troubled by the contradictions between the operative beliefs in the two spheres. As a scientist from

the Indian Institute of science described the situation some years ago, 'many of us are double people. As scientists we are rational. But when we leave the laboratory and go home, we behave differently.'

this is the phenomenon of compartmentalization made famous in the Indian context by Milton singer in his influential 1972 book, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* . singer admired the country's unique 'cultural metabolism' that allowed Indians to keep religion and science/industry in two separate boxes, each with its own norms and its own objectives. Indians are supposed to be exceptionally good at compartmentalizing, thanks to what Alan Roland calls their 'radar sensibility' which makes them extraordinarily sensitive to what is expected of them in different contexts. Growing up in a society where different jatis have their own gods and their own cultural norms, the Indian way of thinking is supposed to be far more context sensitive and attuned to the particulars of any given situation than the universalizing tendencies of Judaeo-Christian religions and modern science. For many educated Indians, science classrooms and laboratories make up just one more particular context with its own peculiar rules and assumptions, which is supposed to coexist with other contexts with their equally valid rules and assumptions. singer and his generation of India watchers were awestruck by modern Indians' ability to take whatever they liked from the modern scientific world, and retrofit it into their 'Great tradition', without disturbing

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